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A PLEA FOR SEPTUAGINT STUDY.

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The writers on the uses of the Septuagint have dealt almost exclusively with its value as authority for textual criticism. In this respect, however, very little use of the text is actually made. It is only read for comparison in isolated passages, consequently in a fragmentary manner. It is not valued for itself. Like a witness in court, its whole use is to throw light on something exterior to itself. There is no especial use of its being in Greek, since any other language would have served equally well. The Greek is esteemed peculiarly useful only in so far as it was capable of making such a literal translation that it can easily be turned back into the original Hebrew. Many students have read no more of the Septuagint than occasional verses to which they have been referred by some authority. The value of the Septuagint as thus employed is very great. I do not say a word to disparage even such a limited use. Indeed, this would be its sole value if the Old Testament stood by itself. All I have to say is based on the assumption that every Old Testament student is primarily a Bible-student.

The Old Testament has an enormous value in itself, but after all, its greatest value is its position as the foundation of the New Testament.

The New Testament cannot be understood without the Old. Its life, its customs, its thought were Hebrew through and through. Though the New Testament comes to us in Greek form, the Greek is essentially only a translation of the Aramaic which was spoken by the men whose deeds and words are there recorded. The best New Testament commentators throw much light on some passages by showing what must have been the Aramaic original, in Christ's discourses for example.

The Septuagint was used very largely in Christ's time; and Hebraistic Greek was founded on it, as modern German on Luther's translation of the Bible. A wide knowledge of the Septuagint is therefore absolutely necessary for any one who would make any pretensions to New Testament scholarship. Yet the Septuagint does not belong to the New Testament field of study primarily. To be understood and appreciated it must be made throughout an Old Testament study. A classic cannot be translated so that the translation shall be anything like as good as the original.

The Septuagint must be read as a translation with constant reference to the Hebrew which it represents. It would not be of such great value to one who did not read Hebrew. The student must read the Septuagint and understand all the time exactly what Hebrew ideas are conveyed by the Greek words. That makes it so valuable for the understanding of the New Testament. The one who has read the Septuagint as I have suggested can read the New, seeing in the Greek the original ideas of the Hebrew mind, or of the mind trained to Hebrew learning.

This use of the Septuagint has been recognized and employed chiefly by lexicographers of the New Testament. Thayer elucidates many words by giving the corresponding Hebrew word for which they were used in the Septuagint.

The practical question is how to use the Septuagint so as to make it most effective for this purpose. In my judgment it could not be done best by a minute study of particular words, or of selected passages, but by rapid reading of large amounts. Questions of exegesis could be dispensed with except so far as necessary to get a clear sense of the original.

The aim should be to learn the meaning of the Greek language by reference to the Hebrew. Constant reference to the Hebrew would be necessary. The classical use of the Greek words must of necessity be presupposed as known; but the exact meaning of a word in any given case must be determined by the Hebrew original.

If one were to read frequently in the Septuagint in this way, he would soon find his New Testament easy, pleasant and profitable reading.

I make this plea for a larger use of the Septuagint, with full consideration for the difficulties. The student in the theological seminary—the most available candidate for such work—is already pretty well crowded with studies. No translation of the Old Testament can make a very strong claim to the department of the New Testament; though it would be so vastly profited thereby. So long as students are admitted to our seminaries without knowing a Hebrew character, it is necessary to use the whole time on that language.

At the present time when so much progress is being made with the cognate languages, strong efforts are made to induce students to attempt these. On the other hand, it is to be considered that seminaries as a rule require as a condition of admission the ability to read ordinary Greek prose with facility. Students begin at once the study of the New Testament Greek. A large part of the Septuagint could therefore be read in the way I have suggested in a comparatively short time. It could not be undertaken with greatest profit until considerable Hebrew was mastered; and by that time the continued reading of the New Testament Greek would make it an easy task to read all the parts of the Septuagint which had been read in the original.

In one seminary (Alexandria) the Septuagint and Hebrew are read comparatively; but with the result, as I am told, of accomplishing too little in Hebrew.

One means of making this reform would be to give a larger proportion of the student's time to Bible study. In one seminary the senior class has one hour a week in Old Testament study, and four hours in systematic divinity. If those figures could be reversed there would be better equipped men coming from that, in most respects, excellent institution. The Bible—not dogmatics—is the clergyman's specialty.

It is not only in the seminary that good work could be done. The American Institute of Hebrew has done much to further Bible study. Its commendable zeal could do something with this important subject. A course in the Septuagint might be given in each of its Summer Schools. The recent publication of an excellent text (Swete's) makes this all the easier. Then the Correspondence School could have a course in this subject. In no case would this be a departure from the purpose of the Institute. It would be an attractive addition to the already extensive list of courses, and would do something toward winning the attention of a new class of students to Bible study.

I hope this paper will appeal to a wider field still. A start in this direction may be made at once by any minister or student who reads Greek and Hebrew at all. If only he sees the importance of it, he may begin without any vote of Faculty or Corporation. Any such individual movement is making in the right direction, a wider range of Bible knowledge.